

Draft Remarks

President of the Economic and Social Council

SIDS Symposium – Session V

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. Moderator,

I am delighted to take part in this session.

This session is called “Monitoring, reporting and building statistical capacities” but it is in reality a session about implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and grounding implementation in evidence based frameworks.

Statistics and data are critical for supporting effective decision-making and policies. Reviews of progress are a way to track achievements, make course correction and learn from our actions.

We are here to reflect on the challenges SIDS face in those areas in this second year of the implementation of the SDGs and how they can be addressed.

Let me touch on three points in my remarks.

Firstly, the imperative of improving national statistical capacities:

The current situation regarding data and statistics is one of high contrasts. On the one hand, there is a multiplication of data from multiple sources related to ICT – This brings many opportunities but also significant challenges – On the other hand, statistical capacities remain very weak in many countries.

The data revolution should be accompanied by a revolution in statistical capacities if we are to truly respond to the challenges of the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda echoes this need for building statistical capacities in the SIDS in particular. During the negotiations on the Agenda, SIDS were instrumental in drawing attention to the limitations of their statistical capacities.

Both 2030 Agenda and the SAMOA Pathway place much emphasis on the importance for data to be of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated in particular.

Such data enables governments in SIDS, and elsewhere, to evaluate their current situation, establish baselines, develop effective policies, review progress as implementation proceeds and assess what policy adjustments need to be made to achieve the SDGs and reach those that are furthest behind. Post facto, statistics allow governments to objectively assess what they have achieved and improve their policy-making through lessons learned.

Implementing the SDGs thus requires that national statistical offices have adequate resources, skills and tools to collect and analyse traditional data such as those from household surveys. Governments also need to be able to mobilize big data, use it effectively and address the related challenges notably for privacy and security.

Governments also need to be able to develop and use national indicators, taking inspiration from the over 230 indicators developed by the Inter Agency Expert Group.

Public institutions, business and civil society need to work together to help bolster SIDS capacities to mobilize and use statistics and data. Last month, over 1500 participants from around the world came together at the first ever UN World Data Forum in South Africa. They discussed how to harness the power of data and statistics for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Participants came from all walks of life. The Forum resulted in a Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. It sets out a framework for member countries to assess, build and strengthen national statistical offices' capacity. I hope that SIDS will fully engage and benefit from this process.

My second point is about the pivotal role of country-level reviews of progress: One way the 2030 Agenda differs from the MDGs is that it put in place a sophisticated architecture for follow-up and review. The negotiators saw follow-up and review as a critical way to accelerate implementation of the SDGs. Reviewing progress aims at helping governments to constantly improve their policies – It is also a way to maintain accountability to people. The follow-up and review envisioned by the 2030 Agenda operates at national, regional and global levels. But the national level is truly the foundation of all the efforts.

The 2030 Agenda thus encourages countries to conduct regular reviews of progress towards the SDGs at national level. Those country-level reviews are part of what any government does to assess the development situation in the country and keep the impact of its policies under review.

These country-level reviews are to be conducted in the manner a country chooses, be it through existing institutions or through new platforms. The 2030 Agenda recognizes that national parliaments can have a major role in the reviews.

Supreme audit institutions (SAIs) can also be engaged. The International Organization of SAIs (INTOSAI) has launched a major process to help SAIs audit SDG implementation. We have here with us today the General Auditors of Brazil and Jamaica who I am sure will say more on this.

At the same time, the reviews must respect a number of principles defined in the 2030 Agenda – For example they need to be inclusive and transparent, evidence-based and geared to the furthest behind.

I would like to encourage SIDS governments to engage in this kind of regular country-level review of SDG implementation, as a routine part of delivering on their development responsibilities.

My third point is about the importance, of the National Voluntary Reviews of SDG implementation at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF).

The HLPF is the central platform for SDG follow-up and review at global level. The 2030 Agenda encourages all member states to volunteer for carrying out national reviews at the HLPF. The national voluntary reviews aim to track progress in implementing the SDGs and global targets.

They also aim at facilitating a sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned. As I said, they ultimately aim at accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and strengthening policies and institutions. It is hoped that they lead to launching of partnerships at the HLPF.

These reviews are country-led. They are certainly not finger-pointing exercises, but much rather an opportunity to mobilize advice and support. They are expected to build on existing processes where possible to minimize the reporting burden.

During the 2016 HLPF 22 countries presented their National Voluntary Reviews, including Samoa. The discussions on this first round of National Voluntary Reviews allowed countries to learn from one another on how to conduct the reviews and address the early challenges related to implementing the 2030 Agenda.

I should say that countries pointed out that the limited availability of data, and particularly disaggregated data, had been a challenge in preparing for the reviews.

In this year's High-Level Political Forum, 42 countries will present their voluntary national reviews, including Maldives. Two countries have already signed for the 2018 reviews, including Singapore. I encourage SIDS present here to volunteer for the 2018 reviews. This would allow learning about how the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is progressing in their special situations. It would also provide an opportunity to flag statistical gaps and their impacts and rally international support.

To conclude, I very much look to the SIDS to set an example on how country-level reviews of progress towards the SDGs and national voluntary reviews at the HLPF can work. I also hope that this Symposium and other coming events will help to build statistical capacities of SIDS – I call on organizations who are here with us to intensify their support and launch new partnerships.

I look forward to fruitful discussions during this Session.

Thank you.